



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



SFVAHCS RECEIVES QUALITY EXCELLENCE AWARD

Congratulations! The Sioux Falls VA Health Care System was selected for the second year in a row to win the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations Quality Excellence Award.

This honor recognizes a project focused on offering video to home appointments that increases choice of care options and convenience for patients. The goal of the project was to increase the number of unique patients receiving health care using video to home and to increase the number of home clinic visits scheduled to different service areas within the VA system.

During the less-than-six-month project, the number of unique patients receiving video to home visits had an increase difference of 1.112%, which was over a 150% increase from baseline. The number of home clinic scheduled appointments into different service areas rose to an almost 45% increase, which was more than 30 additional appointments.

This award will be presented during the Joint Award Luncheon at the SDAHO annual convention on Sept. 20. Congrats to the team of Justin Aylward, Jey Cole, Kristin Norris, Mike Vasek, Kevin Vaughn, Dr. Kasinathan, Mandy Chandler, Ember Bartels, Becky Bixler, Ryan Rand, and Alex Sebby!

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

VA To Grow Outreach	2
VSO Update	3
SDVAHCS Orientation	3
VA Scorecard.....	4
SFVAHCS Town Hall.....	4
NCA Update	5
SDNG Recognition.....	6
Transition Assistance	7
Upcoming Events	8



VA TO HIRE 50 OUTREACH SPECIALISTS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced that it is ready to hire an additional 50 Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) specialists following President Trump's signing today of the Veterans Treatment Court Improvement Act of 2018, a new law shoring up support services to veterans impacted by the justice system.

The law requires the VA, within one year of enactment, to hire 50 additional VJO specialists and place them at eligible VA medical centers (VAMCs); the VJO specialists will, either exclusively or in addition to other duties, serve as part of a justice team in a Veterans Treatment Court or other Veteran-focused court.

"By signing this bill into law, President Trump is demonstrating the VA's commitment to supporting America's veterans, particularly those who may be navigating difficult chapters in their lives," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Since incarceration is often linked to homelessness, mental health issues and substance abuse, the VJO specialists will help facilitate these veterans' access to numerous VA programs and resources."

Created in 2009, the VA's Veterans Justice Outreach (VJO) Program currently funds 314 VJO specialist positions across the U.S., including 53 added in fiscal year 2018. VJO specialists serve veterans at earlier stages of the criminal justice process, with a three-pronged focus on outreach to community law enforcement, jails and courts.

VJO specialists at each VA medical center work with veterans in the local criminal justice system (including but not limited to Veterans Treatment Courts), conduct outreach in jails, and engage with law enforcement by delivering VA-focused training sessions and other informational presentations. VJO specialists have served more than 184,000 justice-involved Veterans since 2009.

The first Veterans Treatment Court started in Buffalo, NY in 2008. There are now 551 Veterans Treatment Courts and other veteran-focused courts operating in the U.S. The VA is a critical partner for these courts, and VJO specialists serve as members of the courts' interdisciplinary treatment teams.

Veterans Treatment Courts are a veteran-specific adaptation of the drug court model. Unlike traditional criminal courts, Veterans Treatment Courts are not adversarial; the judge, prosecutor, defense counsel, and others work together as a team to ensure that veteran defendants access the treatment services they need and fulfill any other requirements imposed by the court.

For more information about the Veterans Justice Outreach Program, visit <https://www.va.gov/HOMELESS/VJO.asp>.



COUNTY VSO ADDRESS CHANGES

Effective September 24, Pennington County Veterans Service Office will be located at 321 Kansas City Street—Suite 100 in Rapid City. Phone, fax and email addresses will remain the same.

Effective immediately, Butte County Veterans Service Office will be located at 849 5th Avenue in Belle Fourche. Phone number and email remain the same. Fax number has changed to 605-892-9064.



SDDVA TO PARTICIPATE IN SFVAHCS ORIENTATION CLASSES

Erin Bultje, program manager for the South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs will be one of the presenters at the Sioux Falls VA Health Care System's "New Veteran Orientation Classes." The classes will be held the first and third Thursdays of each month and will be held on second floor of the new primary care addition (Room 2013) of the SFVAHCS (2501 W. 22nd Street).

The agenda for the orientation classes will include: a brief history of the facility, VA services, suicide prevention, whole health, specialty services, woman veterans health services, care in the community, and volunteer and safety information.

Bultje will be addressing veterans benefits, South Dakota Joining Forces and the State Veterans Home.



VA SCORECARD

Using a web-based report scorecard that measures, evaluates and benchmarks quality and efficiency at its medical centers, the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) recently released data that showed significant improvements at the majority of its health care facilities.

Compared with [data from the same period a year ago](#), the July 2018 release of [VA's Strategic Analytics for Improvement and Learning \(SAIL\)](#) report showed 103 (71 percent) VA Medical Centers (VAMCs) have improved in overall quality — with the largest gains seen in areas where there were VA-wide improvement initiatives, such as mortality, length of stay and avoidable adverse events. Seven (5 percent) VAMCs had a small decrease in quality.

"This is a major step in the right direction to improving our quality of services for our veterans," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "Over the past year, we were able to identify our problems and implement solutions to fixing the issues at 71 percent of our facilities. I'm extremely proud of our employees and the progress they have made to raise the VA's performance for our nation's heroes."

Additionally, of the 15 medical centers placed under the Strategic Action for Transformation program (StAT), an initiative that monitors high-risk medical centers and mobilizes resources to assist the facilities, 33 percent (five medical centers) are no longer considered high-risk and 73 percent (11 medical centers) show meaningful improvements since being placed under StAT in January 2018.

The quarterly SAIL report, which has been released publicly since 2015, assesses 25 quality metrics and two efficiency and productivity metrics in areas such as death rate, complications and patient satisfaction, as well as overall efficiency and physician capacity at 146 VAMCs. It is used as an internal learning tool for VA leaders and personnel to pinpoint and study VAMCs with high quality and efficiency scores, both within specific measured areas and overall. The data is also used to identify best practices and develop strategies to help troubled facilities improve.

SFVAHCS SIOUX CITY TOWN HALL

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Sioux Falls Health Care System and Dakotas Regional Office will hold a town hall Tuesday, September 25, 2018, at the Red Cross at 4200 War Eagle Dr., Sioux City, Iowa. The town hall begins at 5:00 p.m.

VA leadership will provide an update about the VA clinic that will relocate to Dakota Dunes in November. In addition, veterans, their families, community agencies, and businesses are invited to be part of an open discussion to ask questions, share ideas, and voice opinions.

VA staff will also be available from 4:00-5:00 p.m. to visit with veterans about VA health care, individual eligibility, and how to enroll for care or file disability claims.

NCA WELCOME NONPROFIT VOLUNTEERS

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs announced that its National Cemetery Administration is partnering with more than 2,000 green-industry professionals across the country Sept. 19 to host “Saluting Branches: Arborists United for Veteran Remembrance,” an opportunity for tree-care professionals to help maintain and beautify VA cemeteries.

“The work and volunteerism of Saluting Branches shows everyone has unique skills and abilities that can contribute to recognizing and honoring the sacrifice of America’s veterans,” said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. “We partner with communities and organizations across the nation to help build the national profile and importance of honoring veterans through memorialization.”

The volunteers will donate a full day’s work, including pruning and trimming, to 53 veterans cemeteries around the country as a way of honoring veterans and their families. Of the 53 cemeteries hosting volunteers, 36 are VA national cemeteries. Last year, volunteers donated an estimated \$4 million in services.

“We developed Saluting Branches as a green-industry project to honor veterans and improve the environment through the science of tree care,” said Deb Peterson, Saluting Branches coordinator. “This is an important event for the arborist community and allows us to give back to those who have served us.”

Rainbow Treecare, located in Minnetonka, Minnesota, created the Saluting Branches Day of Service at Fort Snelling National Cemetery.

The VA operates 136 national cemeteries and 33 soldiers’ lots and monument sites in 40 states and Puerto Rico. More than 4 million Americans, including veterans of every war and conflict, are buried in VA’s national cemeteries. The VA also provides funding to establish, expand, improve and maintain 111 veterans cemeteries in 48 states and territories including tribal trust lands, Guam, and Saipan.

For veterans not buried in a VA national cemetery, the VA provides headstones, markers or medallions to commemorate their service. In 2017, the VA honored more than 361,892 veterans and their loved ones with memorial benefits in national, state, tribal, and private cemeteries.



SOLDIER AND NCO OF THE YEAR NAMED

The South Dakota Army National Guard selected six enlisted Soldiers and seven non-commissioned officers to compete in the state's Best Warrior Competition in Rapid City and Sturgis, Sept. 7-9, to identify the next Soldier and Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year (BWC), respectively.

After the three-day competition, Staff Sgt. Cory Cody, of White Owl, and a member with the 211th Engineer Company, was named the SDARNG's Non-Commissioned Officer of the Year. Pfc. Nicholas Rios, of Rapid City, and a member with the Headquarters Company, 109th Regional Support Group, was named the SDARNG Soldier of the Year.

The BWC challenges the competitors academically, technically, physically and mentally.

This year's competition was changed to mirror the intensity that the soldiers may face the regional and national level competitions. The timing of the state competition was also changed from April 2019 to September 2018 to give the winner's more time to train and prepare for the regional competition next spring.

Cody and Rios will advance to the Region 6 Best Warrior Competition scheduled to be held in North Dakota, spring 2019, where they'll face competitors from Alaska, Idaho, Montana, North Dakota, Oregon, Washington and Wyoming.

At regionals, they will be tested on a variety of skill sets, which can include warrior tasks and battle drills, written essays, uniforms and appearance, drill and ceremony, land navigation and map reading, first aid, weapon systems, physical fitness and general Army knowledge.

The NCO of the Year runner-up/alternate was Sgt. Daniel Ward, 129th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment, and the Soldier of the Year runner-up/alternate was Spc. Rylie Fleckenstein, Alpha Battery, 1/147th Field Artillery Battalion.

The competition and the training involved to prepare for it provides the competitors not only with the opportunity to improve themselves, but to improve their peers and subordinates as well.

SIoux FALLS VA TOWN HALL

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) Sioux Falls Health Care System and Dakotas Regional Office will hold a town hall Thursday, September 27, 2018, at the Sioux Falls VA Medical Center at 2501 W. 22nd Street, Sioux Falls, SD.

The town hall will begin at 5:00 p.m. with updates from VA leadership about VA health care and benefits issues. Veterans, their families, community agencies, and businesses are then invited to be part of an open discussion to ask questions, share ideas, and voice opinions.

VA staff will also be available from 4:00-5:00 p.m. to visit with veterans about VA health care, individual eligibility, how to enroll for care or file disability claims.

You've Served Your Country

Now Let Us Serve You.

Transition Assistance Advisors can connect you to Veterans Affairs benefits, healthcare, and more, walking you through the system to get you the services you deserve.

Transition Assistance: Getting you out of the toll-free number jungle!

Have you just returned from deployment? Do you have a service-related injury or healthcare issue? Perhaps you're about to retire from service and you're looking for someone to show you how to get back into the swing of civilian life. Getting to know your local Transition Assistance Advisor means you'll have reliable, professional support whenever you need it, whatever the circumstance.

Our Transition Assistance Advisors are in every State, Territory, and the District to ensure you have a hand to help you receive the benefits you've earned as a result of your service in the military.

What Transition Assistance Advisors can do for you?

Transition Assistance Advisors work with other Joint Forces Headquarters staff members and Directors of State Family Programs to build a state network of support with Veterans Affairs and community organizations for Service members and their families to access in their community.

Transition Assistance Advisors (TAAs) will:

1. Help you cut through the red tape. We provide information and assistance to Service members and their families to help them understand and access state and federal benefits as well as services through the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), Veterans Health Administration (VHA), Veterans Business Administration (VBA) Military Health System and the Department of Labor.

2. Meet your Post-Deployment needs. We coordinate with VA, TRICARE, Veteran Service Organizations, and other federal, state and community resources to provide important information and help with obtaining services to meet your needs during the post-deployment period.

3. See you through changes in your Military Service. We participate in the mobilization and demobilization process to brief and advise members and their families about available VA entitlements and available resources in their communities.

4. Ensure your health and well-being are taken care of. We help coordinate activities for the Post-Deployment Health Reassessment event (a screening evaluation for any lingering physical and mental health conditions Service members may experience at 3-6 months post-deployment).

5. Strive to be your personal problem solver. We research and resolve issues associated with entitlements whenever you or your family members encounter problems.

6. Get the right folks involved when you need their help. We advise the Joint Forces Headquarters and coordinate with Family Support Specialists, Employer Support Group to give you the access to entitlements available through Department of Veterans Affairs, Department of Labor and other veterans' entitlement and benefit programs.



Why we're so good at what we do

With more than 90% of TAAs being prior service military and military spouses, we understand how hard it can be to access services, benefits, and entitlements. Many of us have worked through the complicated disability process and receive disability compensation, using our personal experiences as motivation to give you the support you deserve. We care about you and your family's well-being, which is why we make it our business to build strong partnerships and coalitions with:

- Department of Defense TRICARE
- Veterans Affairs and State Directors of Veterans Affairs
- Veterans Services Organizations
- State Headquarters groups (Family Support, Chaplains Offices, Department of Labor, and Employer Support for the Guard and Reserve (ESGR))

**Contact Christian Johnson, the SD Transition Assistance Advisor (TAA) today at:
605-737-6669 or christian.m.johnson.ctr@mail.mil**

UPCOMING EVENTS

Sept 21—7th Annual POW/MIA Program—Sioux Falls Veterans Memorial Park (1021 W. Bailey Street) - 6:30 pm (CT)
 Sept 25—Veterans Town Hall—Sioux City Red Cross (4200 War Eagle Dr, Sioux City) - 5:00 pm (CT)
 Sept 25—Pierre Project Connect—Faith Lutheran Church (714 N. Grand Avenue) - 3:00—7:00 pm (CT)
 Sept 27—Veterans Town Hall—Sioux Falls VA Medical Center (2501 W. 22nd Street)—5:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 5-7—VFW Council of Administration—Cedar Shores Resort—Oacoma
 Oct 6—VFW State Commander/Aux. President Homecoming—Cedar Shores Resort—Oacoma
 Oct 6—VA Women Veterans Conference—Central Church—Sioux Falls (3100 W. Ralph Rogers Road) - 9:00 am (CT)
 Oct 8—Native American Heritage Day (state offices closed)
 Oct 10—SD Veterans Commission Meeting—RedRossa Grille—Pierre—8:00 am (CT)
 Oct 12-13—DAV Fall Conference—DAV Dept. Headquarters (1519 W. 51st Street) - Sioux Falls
 Oct 13—BHSU Hero Appreciation Game—Lyle Hare Stadium—Spearfish—1:00 pm (MT)
 Oct 19—Open House new Spirit Lake CBOC—3:00 pm (CT)
 Oct 23—SD Veterans Council Meeting—PVA Headquarters (209 N. Garfield Ave.—Sioux Falls) - 10:00 am (CT)
 Nov 11—Veterans Day Community Program—Lincoln High School—Sioux Falls—10:30 am (CT)
 Nov 11—Veterans Day Last Call Ceremony—SFVAHCS—1:30 pm (CT)
 Nov 12—State Offices Closed
 Nov 16—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs —10:00 am (MT)
 Nov 16—Dakota Dunes CBOC Open House—2:00 pm (CT)
 Dec 4—Governor's Budget Address—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 8—Governor's State of the State—State Capitol—1:00 pm (CT)
 Jan 13-18—VFW Accredited Service Officer Training—Annapolis, MD
 Mar 3-7—VFW Legislative Conference
 July 20-24—National VFW Convention—Orlando, FL



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